

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6614
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PORT LOUIS 363

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT ECON MP
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - APRIL 8

REF: PORT LOUIS 318

SUMMARY: PORT LOUIS 362 PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THIS CABLE.
END SUMMARY

1. THE POLITICAL SCENE THIS PAST WEEK WAS DOMINATED BY A GREAT
DEBATE OVER NATIONALIZATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT COALITION
AND THE OPPOSITION MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM). IT
BEGAN WEHN AGRICULTURE MINISTER BOOLELL STRONGLY ATTACKED
THE MMM OPPOSITION IN THE ASSEMBLY ON APRIL 1. HE ACCUSED
THE PARTY OF HAVING SOWED SUBVERSION FOR THE PAST EIGHT
YEARS, OF HAVING ENCOURAGED A WHOLE GENERATION OF STUDENTS
TO ENGAGE IN "VIOLENCE, INSOLENT AND DISOBEDIENCE," SO THAT
THEY DO NOT WANT TO WORK. THE MINISTER SAID THE MMM'S PROGRAM
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OF NATIONALIZATION IS DESIGNED TO DISCOURAGE FOREIGN INVESTORS,
WHO ARE THE SOURCE OF NEW JOBS AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE. IN A
NUMBER OF COUNTRIES NATIONALIZATION MEANS FORCED LABOR, BOOLELL
SAID. HIS PARTY, LABOR, FAVORS PRESERVATION OF THE PRESENT
SYSTEM OF A MIXED ECONOMY. BOOLELL SAID WHAT IS NEEDED IS
"NATIONALIZATION" OF THE LEADERS OF THE MMM SO THAT THEY ACT
PATRIOTICALLY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE COUNTRY AND NOT FOR THEIR

"FOREIGN FINANCIAL BACKERS." HE ACCUSED THE MMM OF HAVING "BRAIN-WASHED" THE PORT AND TRANSPORT WORKERS, WITH GRAVE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES FOR THE COUNTRY.

2. FOLLOWING BOOLELL'S SPEECH THE MMM TOOK ONE OF ITS FIRST CONCRETE ACTIONS IN THE PRESENT ASSEMBLY, IN PROPOSING TO AMEND THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM TO PROVIDE FOR NATIONALIZATION OF KEY INDUSTRIES.

3. TWO DAYS LATER BOOLELL DROPPED A POLITICAL BOMB, IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE NEWSPAPER WEEKEND, WHEN HE CAME OUT IN FAVOR OF THE NATIONALIZATION OF CERTAIN "ESSENTIAL SERVICES," NAMELY THE DOCKS, PUBLIC TRANSPORT, PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND PRIVATE CLINICS. HE SAID SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE TO END ANARCHY AND CHAOS IN THESE SECTORS, WHICH AFFECT THE PUBLIC SO MUCH. BOOLELL SAID HIS POSITION DIFFERS FROM THAT OF THE MMM IN THAT HE DOES NOT FAVOR "NATIONALIZATION FOR THE SAKE OF NATIONALIZATION" AND HE OPPOSES NATIONALIZING COMMERCIAL BANKS, INSURANCE COMPANIES AND THE SUGAR INDUSTRY, ABOVE ALL THE LATTER, BECAUSE ANY FALL IN PRODUCTION BY THE SUGAR INDUSTRY WOULD HAVE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE ENTIRE ECONOMY. BOOLELL ADMITTED HE WAS TAKING A NEW POSITION THAT MIGHT AFFECT HIS POLITICAL FUTURE, BUT HE STOOD BY HIS WORDS.

4. YOUNG LABOR DEPUTY JAMES BURTY DAVID, A PROTEGE OF BOOLELL'S, THEN ANNOUNCED IN THE NATION THAT HE PLANNED TO SUBMIT AN AMENDMENT TO THE MMM AMENDMENT, SPECIFYING THAT THE DOCKS, PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS (AND OTHER SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY) SHOULD BE NATIONALIZED "WITH A VIEW

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TO ENSURING A MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF THE NATIONAL WEALTH AND PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE."

5. AN URGENT MEETING OF THE LABOR PARLIAMENTARY GROUP DISCLOSED A DIVISION ON THE QUESTION OF DAVID'S MOTION AND THE PROPOSED NATIONALIZATIONS. THE RESULT AFTER A LONG ARGUMENT WAS THAT DAVID WAS TOLD HE COULD EITHER PRESENT HIS MOTION AND THEN WITHDRAW IT WHEN THE GOVERNMENT STATED ITS OBJECTIONS, OR HE COULD SIMPLY DROP IT. A MAURITIAN DIPLOMAT TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE HAD LEARNED FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH BOOLELL AND RINGADOO THAT THIS AFFAIR REPRESENTED A TEST OF STRENGTH BETWEEN THE TWO MAJOR LABOR PARTY FACTIONS, WITH RINGADOO WINNING THIS ROUND. IT WAS A CURIOUS OUTCOME, FOR BOOLELL IS CONSIDERED THE CONSERVATIVE AND RINGADOO THE LEFTIST, YET THE FORMER WANTS TO PUSH NATIONALIZATION AND THE LATTER OPPOSES IT AS INEFFICIENT. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM TOOK THE POSITION THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM ANNOUNCED IN THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE ALREADY PERMITS NATIONALIZATION, SO DAVID'S AMENDMENT WAS UNNECESSARY.

6. WHEN THE ASSEMBLY MET AGAIN, FINANCE MINISTER RINGADOO CARRIED THE BURDEN OF THE GOVERNMENT'S EXPLANATION OF ITS OPPOSITION TO THE MMM'S NATIONALIZATION PROPOSAL, WITH A FORCEFUL 90 MINUTE SPEECH WHICH DEFENDED THE PERFORMANCE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR. HE ACCUSED THE MMM OF HAVING WORKED FOR EIGHT YEARS TO SABOTAGE THE MAURITIAN ECONOMY. HE CALLED THEM INNOCENT AGENTS OF SOVIET AND CUBAN IMPERIALISM WHO WANT TO DESTROY THE SUGAR INDUSTRY, WHICH IS THE BACKBONE OF THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY, AND TO INSTALL A POLITICAL REGIME WHICH IS SO CONTRARY TO THE MAURITIAN CHARACTER THAT IT COULD ONLY BE IMPOSED BY FORCE. RINGADOO PRAISED THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SUGAR INDUSTRY AND SAID IT WAS THE ENVY OF MANY OTHER COUNTRIES SUCH AS JAMAICA, GUYANA AND CUBA. HE NOTED HOW SUGAR PRODUCTION HAD FALLEN IN CUBA UNDER THE CASTRO REGIME. HE PRAISED THE WIDE-RANGING INVESTMENTS MADE BY THE INDUSTRY IN OTHER SECTORS, THE EMPLOYMENT THEY HAVE CREATED, AND THE

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PROFITS THEY HAVE GIVEN UP TO KEEP THE DOMESTIC PRICE OF SUGAR THE LOWEST IN THE WORLD.

7. THE FINANCE MINISTER SAID THE GOVERNMENT IS HEADING IN THE DIRECTION OF NATIONALIZING THE DOCKS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT, BUT THIS MUST BE DONE CAREFULLY AND WITH LOTS OF PLANNING. AS FOR THE OTHER SECTORS SUCH AS BANKS AND INSURANCE COMPANIES WHICH THE MMM WANTS NATIONALIZED, RANGADOO SAID THEY ARE FULLY UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND ARE MAKING A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY. THE GOVERNMENT TAKES A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO SOCIALISM. THE MAURITIAN ECONOMY IS FRAGILE, HE SAID, IT MUST NOT BE DESTROYED BY EXPERIMENTATION, AND SOCIALISM IS NOT ONLY NATIONALIZATION. RINGADOO SUGGESTED BERENGER TALK ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO SOME OF THE COUNTRIES HE HAS VISITED SUCH AS MADAGASCAR, WHICH NO LONGER EXPORTS RICE AND HAS TO GET OIL FROM MAURITIUS, AND TANZANIA, WHERE THE SHOPS ARE EMPTY.

8. BOOLELL THEN SPOKE AND ACCUSED THE MMM OF BEING DOCTRINAIRE. HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT OPPOSED TO THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONALIZATION, BUT NOT FOR ITS OWN SAKE. HE SAID NATIONALIZATION WOULD NOT NECESSARILY MAKE AN INDUSTRY MORE EFFICIENT AND POINTED TO THE "DISASTROUS" ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE MASSIVE NATIONALIZATIONS IN THE COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE. BOOLELL ALSO OPPOSED NATIONALIZING THE SUGAR INDUSTRY BECAUSE IT IS BASIC TO THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF THE NATION.

9. DAVID STUCK WITH HIS PROPOSAL TO NATIONALIZE THE DOCKS, TRANSPORT AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS, BUT SAID IT SHOULD ONLY BE

DONE AFTER CAREFUL PLANNING. BHAYAT OF THE MMM ACCUSED
RINGADOO OF ACTING AS SPOKESMAN FOR THE SUGAR INDUSTRY AND
SAID THE LABOR PARTY SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF ABANDONING ITS
LONG-TIME POLICY OF FAVORING NATIONALIZATION. HE SAID THE
COMPANIES MAKING BIG PROFITS SHOULD BE TAKEN OVER BY THE STATE
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NOW, NOT WHEN THEY ARE ABOUT TO FAIL.

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10. IN THE END DAVID DID NOT PRESENT HIS AMENDMENT. THE MMM
AMENDMENT PROPOSED BY BIBI WAS DEFEATED BY A VOTE OF 36 TO
33 ALONG STRICT PARTY LINES. ANOTHER MMM DEPUTY PROPOSED
SIX ADDITIONAL AMENDMENTS, ALL OF WHICH WERE VOTED DOWN BY
THE GOVERNMENT SIDE AFTER THE MMM STAGED A WALK-OUT TO PROTEST
WHAT THEY CONSIDERED THE PREMATURE CUTOFF OF DEBATE ON THE
SPEECH FROM THE THRONE THROUGH A GOVERNMENT PARLIAMENTARY
MANEUVER. THESE LATTER AMENDMENTS WOULD HAVE CALLED FOR LIFTING
THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, THE RETROCESSION OF DIEGO GARCIA,
FINANCIAL AID FOR UNIONS, FREE PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION, CHANGES
IN THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT, AND ABOLITION OF DEPUTIES'

PENSIONS. WITH THE MMM ABSENT, THE GOVERNMENT SIDE THEN ADOPTED A MOTION OF THANKS FOR THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE, THUS ENDING A MONTH'S DEBATE ON THIS SUBJECT.

11. COMMENT: LE MILITANT (MMM) SAID THE "DEFEAT" SUFFERED BY BOOLELL AND DAVID MADE THEM LOOK "RIDICULOUS." IT IS TRUE THAT THEIR ON-AGAIN-OFF-AGAIN PERFORMANCE DID NOT MAKE THEM CONFIDENTIAL

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LOOK GOOD, BUT THE MOST INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT FROM ALL THIS WAS AN APPARENT SHIFT OF POWER IN THE DIRECTION OF RINGADOO, WHO FOR YEARS HAS BEEN CONSIDERED A LEFTIST BUT HAS NOW SUDDENLY BECOME THE DARLING OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THEIR CANDIDATE TO SUCCEED RAMGOOLAM AS PRIME MINISTER. HERETOFORE BOOLELL WAS THE FAVORITE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR, BUT ONE NOW HEARS HE IS "LAZY" AND "ERRATIC" AND "IMPLUSIVE." END COMMENT.

12 THE ASSEMBLY MET AGAIN ON APRIL 7 AND ADJOURNED UNTIL APRIL 26, FOLLOWING THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. IT ADOPTED AMENDMENTS TO THE IMMIGRATION AND DEPORTATION ACTS TO PERMIT THE PRIME MINISTER TO PREVENT PERMANENT RESIDENCY IN MAURITIUS BY FOREIGNERS WHO MARRY MAURITIANS WOMEN FOR THE PURPOSE OF BECOMING CITIZENS. THE MMM OPPOSED THE MEASURES AS BEING RETROGRADE AND DISCRIMINATORY AGAINST WOMEN, AS VIOLATING A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT, AND AS GIVING DICTATORIAL POWERS TO THE PRIME MINISTER. (COMMENT: IN THIS CASE THE ARGUMENT, IF NOT THE VOTE, WAS CLEARLY WON BY THE MMM. END COMMENT.)

13. IN HIS WEEKEND INTERVIEW (PARA 3 ABOVE) BOOLELL DISAGREED WITH DUVAL'S CHARACTERIZATION OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AS THE MAURITIANS' "LAST CHANCE." HE SAID THEIR IMPORTANCE SHOULD NOT BE EXAGGERATED, FOR THERE ARE LIKELY TO BE A LOT OF ABSTENTIONS, THE VOTES OF URBAN PEOPLE ARE NOT AN EXPRESSION OF THE "NATIONAL WILL," AND THERE SEEMS TO BE A GENERAL APATHY AS THEY ARE BEING HELD SO SOON AFTER THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. HE AGREED THEY WOULD BE AN INDICATION OF VOTER SENTIMENT TOWARD THE MMM AND THE COALITION, BUT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT TAKE THEIR RESULTS AS A BASIS FOR NATIONAL POLICY.

14. THE GOVERNMENT HAS REJECTED A MMM PROPOSAL THAT THE TV AND RADIO BE PUT AT THE DISPOSITION OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES PARTICIPATING IN THE APRIL 24 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

15. PREMDUTH DOONGOOR, YOUNG LABOR DEPUTY AND PARLIAMENTARY CONFIDENTIAL

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SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF POWER AND ENERGY, RESIGNED FROM THE LABOR PARTY AND FROM HIS POST, AND DECLARED HIS INTENTION TO REMAIN IN THE ASSEMBLY AS AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER. THIS THREATENED TO REDUCE THE COALITION MARGIN OVER THE MMM TO ONE SEAT. DOONGOOR'S ACTION FOLLOWED THE MEETING OF THE LABOR PARLIAMENTARY GROUP AT WHICH DAVID'S NATIONALIZATION PROPOSAL WAS TURNED DOWN. THE NEXT DAY DOONGOOR WITHDREW HIS RESIGNATION AND JOINED HIS COLLEAGUES ON THE LABOR BENCHES IN THE ASSEMBLY.

16. THE NEW POLITBURO OF THE MMM WAS ELECTED ON APRIL 3. IT WAS INCREASED IN SIZE FROM 8 TO 10. FIVE MEMBERS OF THE OLD BUREAU REMAIN. THOSE DROPPED WERE MRS. CZIFFRA, AUGUSTAVE AND BHORRA, WHO FAILED TO BE ELECTED TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE. THE FIVE OFFICERS RE-ELECTED WERE JUGNAUTH AS PRESEIDENT, BERENGER AS SECRETARY GENERAL, BHAYAT AND JUDDOO AS VICE PRESIDENTS, AND DE L'ESTRAC AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL. TWO OTHER OFFICERS, CONSIDERED CLOSE ASSOCIATES OF BERENGER, ARE SHEILA BAPPOO AND SEEVEN CHINIEN AS VICE PRESIDENTS. NEW MEMBERS BIZLALL AND SERVANSHIGH BECAME TREASURER AND ASSISTANT TREASURER RESPECTIVELY, AND MOSAHEB IS A SECOND ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL. (COMMENT: BERENGER WILL CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE PARTY AND ITS POLITBURO. END COMMENT.) THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE "RENEWED ITS CONFIDENCE" IN SYDNEY SELVON, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF LE MILITANT, TO AVOID MISINTERPRETATION OF HIS FAILURE TO BE ELECTED TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE PARTY.

17. RAMSEWAK, MMM DEPUTY AND PRESIDENT OF THE MMM TRADE UNION FEDERATION, THE GENERAL WORKERS FEDERATION (GWF), RETURNED THIS WEEK FROM A VISIT TO MOSCOW AND PARIS. HE TOLD THE PRESS HE HAD APPLIED FOR THE GWF TO JOIN THE PRO-SOVIET WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS AND A WFTU DELEGATION WILL VISIT MAURITIUS SOON. ON SOVIET TV HE DENOUNCED THE "RIGHTIST" TRADE UNIONS IN MAURITIUS AS WELL AS THE COALITION GOVERNMENT. IN PARIS HE MET WITH THE CGT. HE RAN INTO TROUBLE
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WHEN HE TRIED TO GET THE GWF ADMITTED TO THE OAU TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION, WHOSE SECRETARY GENERAL TOLD HIM THAT MAURITIUS COULD ONLY JOIN IF IT HAD A SINGLE NATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION. RAMSEWAK SAID HE HAD MADE CONTACT WITH OTHER "PROGRESSIVE" TRADE UNION MOVEMENTS, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, AND MADAGASCAR AND REUNION. RAMSEWAK ALSO DENOUNCED BADRY'S MAURITIUS LABOR FEDERATION, WHICH IS A MEMBER OF THE WFTU, AS A "PHANTOM" ORGANIZATION WITHOUT MEMBERS (BADRY IS ALSO PRESIDENT OF THE MAURITIUS-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY).

18. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM WILL MAKE A TRIP ABROAD FROM 12 TO 18 APRIL, REPORTEDLY FOR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TALKS IN PARIS AND BRUSSELS, AND TO ATTEND A CONFERENCE IN DAKAR. AGRICULTURE MINISTER BOOLELL WILL REPRESENT THE GOM AT SUGAR TALKS IN FIJI ON APRIL 13 AND IN BRUSSELS BEGINNING APRIL 18.

19. PRIME MINISTER ALBERT RENE OF THE SEYCHELLES WILL MAKE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO MAURITIUS FROM APRIL 11 TO 15. THE GOM PREVENTED RENE FROM MAKING A NON-OFFICIAL VISIT AT THE TIME OF THE DECEMBER PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.

20. AN ARTICLE BY THE ECONOMIC COUNSELOR OF THE MAURITIUS COMMERCIAL BANK REVEALED THAT THERE EXISTS A CRISIS IN THE EXPORT PORCESSING ZONE (EPZ).OF THE 80 ENTERPRISES WHICH HAVE STARTED UP SINCE 1970, 46 ARE MAKING NO PROFIT. OF THESE, 4 HAVE FAILED AND SEVEN OTHERS ARE IN A "DISASTROUS" FINANCIAL SITUATION. STILL, EMPLOYMENT IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR INCREASED 224 PERCENT BETWEEN 1970 AND 1976 DUE TO THE GROWTH OF THE EPZ (WHILE EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE INCREASED ONLY 10 PERCENT) AND THE SHARE OF MANUFACTURES IN MAURITIAN EXPORTS ROSE FROM 3 PERCENT TO 17 PERCENT IN THE SAME PERIOD, DESPITE THE BOOM IN SUGAR PRICES.

21. THE "IMPORT DEPOSIT SCHEME" WHICH WENT INTO EFFECT ON MARCH 5 (PORT LOUIS 235) WAS MODIFIED THIS WEEK TO REDUCE CONFIDENTIAL

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THE REQUIRED THREE MONTH DEPOSIT ON IMPORTS FROM 50 PERCENT OF VALUE TO 35 PERCENT, FOLLOWING TALKS BETWEEN THE IMPORTERS AND THE FINANCE MINISTRY.

22. FOR PARIS, LONDON, CINCUSNAVEUR AND COMIDEASTFOR: PLEASE ADVISE IF YOU WISH TO CONTINUE RECEIVING THIS WEEKLY REPORT. NEGATIVE REPLIES REQUESTED. YOU MAY PREFER TO RECEIVE INSTEAD TWO TO THREE PARAGRAPH SUMMARY CABLE, WHICH WE HAVE BEEN SENDING TO DEPARTMENT ONLY.
KEELEY

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